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SUBJECT: MEDITERRANEAN UNION DOMINATES MUBARAK VISIT

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Kathleen H. Allegrone, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Unresolved issues with the Mediterranean Union -- participation of the Arab League, location of the Union's secretariat, ensuring continuing EU engagement during the Czech EU presidency (or an extension of the French co-presidency), and agreement on a declaration for the November 4 meeting of Mediterranean Union (UPM) foreign ministers in Marseille -- dominated the October 29 visit of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak to Paris. Unfortunately for the French (who are all too aware that a botched meeting in Marseille will lead many to dismiss the UPM as being just as ineffective as the Barcelona Process), President Mubarak and his French hosts made little progress. Presidential Middle East advisor Boris Boillon described the talks as "totally inconclusive." In what the French see as more bad news, Israeli FM Livni has informed them that she will not attend the Marseille ministerial. Boillon noted that Mubarak did not raise the UNESCO candidacy of Egyptian Culture Minister Farouk Hosni, adding that if he had, Sarkozy would have noted that Hosni's candidacy is problematic in light of his "inexplicable and unacceptable" statements about Israel. The Egyptians came away with one deliverable: Sarkozy publicly endorsed expanding the G-8 to incorporate Egypt and other developing states in a new G-14. End summary.

UPM Trumps other Issues

¶2. (C) Presidential Middle East Advisor Boris Boillon, MFA DAS-equivalent for the Levant Ludovic Pouille and Egyptian Embassy Political Counselor Nazih el-Naggary all provided Post with readouts of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's October 29 visit to Paris. Pouille noted that the day began with a breakfast meeting between FMs Kouchner and Aboul Gheit, followed by a meeting between Kouchner and Mubarak (who appeared exhausted to his hosts), and finally the working lunch between Mubarak and President Sarkozy. Discussion of the Mediterranean Union dominated all three meetings. "(There was) Nothing on the Middle East, nothing on the Palestinians, nothing on Syria or Lebanon," Boillon confirmed.

Solution on Arab League Participation?

¶3. (C) With the clock ticking down on the November 4 ministerial in Marseille, Kouchner and Aboul Gheit discussed a number of options for including the Arab League in UPM functions. They agreed that the best formula was to allow Arab League (AL) participation in UPM summits and ministerials, with the stipulation that the AL would not be able to speak unless AL Secretary General Amr Musa attended in person. In addition, the Arab League would be allowed to attend, but only as an observer, the "last meeting of senior officials" (i.e., the final preparatory meeting) prior to an upcoming ministerial. The challenge now for France is to

sell this formula to the Israelis (Pouille did not seem particularly optimistic that the Israelis felt much need to show flexibility), the Arab League (Mubarak told Sarkozy not to worry, that he would speak to Amr Musa) and Syria (which, as current President of the Arab League, could make mischief on this point).

Secretariat Location Up in the Air

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¶4. (C) The location of the UPM's secretariat remains unresolved. Although Mubarak plans to call Tunisian President Ben Ali to assure him that Tunis remains in the running, the reality -- according to Pouille -- is that Syria will use its AL Presidency to ensure that the headquarters is not located in any Arab state that does not already have a formal peace with Israel (so as not to give the Israelis a de facto diplomatic presence in a nominally hostile Arab state). Given the Syrian position, Pouille predicted that Barcelona would likely become the seat of the UPM headquarters. (Note: We understand Malta is also a serious contender as well. End note.)

No Extended UPM Co-Presidency for France

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¶5. (C) The Egyptians were disappointed to hear that France has thus far failed to persuade the Czechs (who are next in line for the EU Presidency) to allow France to "co-preserve" with the Czech Republic over the UPM for the "north" (i.e., Europe) while Egypt presides over the UPM for the "south" (i.e., North Africa and the Levant). Boillon indicated that

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the French would make another run at the Czech PM, who will visit Paris October 31.

Draft Declaration a Disaster

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¶6. (C) By far the most discouraging problem, according to Pouille, was the discord between Israel and the Arabs over the text of the draft declaration for the Marseille meeting. Israel (upon the personal insistence of FM Livni) refuses to accept any reference to the Arab peace initiative (i.e., then-Crown Prince Abdallah's offer of full peace for full withdrawal) in the text of the declaration. Pouille candidly admitted that he was unsure why Livni was so dead-set against acknowledging the Arab offer ("it doesn't cost her anything") but noted that with early elections in the offing, she is even less likely to compromise now than she was in July (when this same dispute obliged the French to drop any reference to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at all, to the consternation of the UPM's Arab members). Moreover, Pouille was discouraged by the fact that Livni has sent word that she will be represented by her deputy (an Israeli Druze, "who will be hated by the Arab delegates and unable to negotiate anything) in Marseille. In short, Pouille sees the draft declaration as a slow-motion train wreck.

No Discussion of Farouk Hosni

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¶7. (C) According to Boillon, Mubarak did not seek Sarkozy's support of Egyptian Culture Minister Farouk Hosni's bid to become the new Director-General of UNESCO. Boillon noted that even if Mubarak had raised the issue, Sarkozy would have told him that Hosni's candidacy is problematic in light of his "inexplicable and unacceptable" statements about Israel, which -- at minimum -- he would need to recant.

Toward a G-14?

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¶8. (C) The one positive take-away for the Egyptians was President Sarkozy's public statement (echoing a position

previously staked out by FM Kouchner in Cairo) in favor of expanding the G-8 to incorporate Egypt and other states into a new G-14.

¶9. (C) Comment: Sarkozy remains keenly interested in making this initiative viable. Holding the summit in July in Paris was portrayed as the first coup of his EU presidency. Although the Presidency tried to pass the dossier over to the MFA to follow up, it has re-engaged in trying to salvage the ministerial and preserve the initiative, including by trying to concoct ways that France can ensure the Union doesn't collapse after it gives up the EU presidency December 31.

STAPLETON